

What is claimed is:

1. An instant messaging (IM) system comprising:
an IM server connected to a communication network; and
5 logic operable on the IM server enabling a first user to browse contacts associated with a second user.
2. The IM system of claim 1 wherein the network is the Internet network.
- 10 3. The IM system of claim 1 wherein the logic additionally enables the first user to add and list contacts accessed by browsing the contacts associated with the second user.
4. The IM system of claim 1 wherein the second user groups contacts in
15 distinct separate lists, and the first user is enabled to browse contacts in only the second user's list that includes the first user as a contact.
5. The IM system of claim 4 further comprising a means operable for the
second user to enable and disable access by the first user to individual ones
20 or lists of contacts associated with the second user.
6. The IM system of claim 1 further comprising a means for the first user to
select a screen name from the contacts of the second user, which selection
adds the selected screen name as a contact for the first user.
- 25 7. The IM system of claim 6 wherein the means for a user to select a screen name is an interactive list displayed to the first user on a display screen of a first computerized appliance connected to the IM network and executing a first instance of client logic of the IM system.

8. The IM system of claim 7 wherein the second user's contacts are stored and displayed on a second computerized appliance executing a second instance of client logic of the IM system.

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9. The IM system of claim 7 wherein, upon the first user selecting a screen name from the contact list of the second instance, the second instance sends a message to a third instance of the IM client on the network, the third instance registered to a person using the selected screen name, the message alerting the person using the selected screen name that the first user is adding his name to the first user's contact list.

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10. The IM system of claim 7 wherein the second instance, upon the first user selecting a name from the contact of the second instance, acts as an intermediary, sending at least a message to a third instance of the IM client registered to the person using the selected screen name, the message seeking approval for addition of the selected screen name to the contact list of the first instance.

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11. The IM system of claim 10 wherein the second instance, upon the first user selecting a screen name from the contact list of the second instance, sends messages to both the third instance registered to the person using the selected screen name, and also to the first user at the first instance, providing introductory information to each of the two users about the other of the two users.

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12. The IM system of claim 11 wherein the two messages sent also seek response from the two users granting or withholding authorization for the addition of each user's screen name to the other user's contact list.

13. An instant messaging (IM) system comprising:

a repository storing profile information about individual users; and

5 a description-based search means executable by users to search the repository for one or more other users based on search criteria entered by the searching user.

14. The IM network of claim 13 wherein the search is conducted without regard to a field.

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15. The IM network of claim 13 wherein the search is performed on a keystroke by keystroke basis.

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16. The IM network of claim 13 wherein the search criteria is imported user information.

17. The IM network of claim 16 wherein the imported information is a telephone number or a digital address imported from a cellular telephone or a personal digital assistant.

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18. A method for providing new contacts to users of an instant messaging (IM) network, comprising:

receiving a field-independent search query; and

25 performing a search of stored user profile information using the query.

19. The method of claim 18 comprising a further action for providing contact information resulting from the search to a user initiating the search query.

20. A method for expanding an instant messaging (IM) system comprising:
providing at least first and second instances of an IM client on first
and second computerized appliances respectively on a network; and
5 providing a browsing means in the first instance of the IM client to
allow browsing screen names in a contact list of the second instance by a
first user of the first instance.
21. The method of claim 20 further comprising initiating the browsing
10 function by selecting one of a menu line item or an interactive icon in an
interactive interface on a display screen one of the computerized
appliances.
22. The method of claim 20 wherein the network is the Internet network
15 and one or more of the computerized appliances are personal computers
connected to the Internet.
23. The method of claim 20 further comprising a user of the second
instance enabling or disabling access by the browsing user of the first
20 instance for individual ones or groups of contacts in contact lists of the
second instance.
24. The method of claim 20 further comprising selecting a screen name
from the contact list of the second instance, which adds the selected screen
25 name as a contact in the contact list of the first instance.
25. The method of claim 24 further comprising displaying an interactive list
of contacts from a contact list of the second instance in a display window of
the first computerized appliance.

26. The method of claim 24 comprising the second instance, upon the first user selecting a name from the contact list of the second instance, sending a message to a third instance of the IM client on the network, the third
5 instance registered to the person using the selected screen name, the message alerting the person using the selected screen name that the first user is adding his name to the first user's contact list.

27. The method of claim 24 comprising the second instance, upon the first
10 user selecting a name from the contact of the second instance, acting as an intermediary, sending at least a message to a third instance of the IM client registered to the person using the selected screen name, the message seeking approval for addition of the selected screen name to the contact list of the first instance.

15 28. The method of claim 27 comprising the second instance, upon the first user selecting a screen name from the contact list of the second instance, sending messages to both the third instance registered to the person using the selected screen name, and also to the first user at the first instance,
20 providing introductory information to each of the two users about the other of the two users.

29. The method of claim 28 wherein the two messages sent also seek response from the two users granting or withholding authorization for the
25 addition of each user's screen name to the other user's contact list.

30. A method for expanding an IM network, comprising:
providing network communication between a first and second user such that each is listed by the other as a contact; and

making other contacts of the first user available for selection by the second user for addition to the second user's contact list.

31. The method of claim 30 wherein the network is the Internet network.

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32. The method of claim 30 wherein the second user groups contacts in distinct separate lists, and the first user is enabled to browse contacts in only the second user's list that includes the first user as a contact.

10 33. The method of claim 32 further comprising the second user enabling and disabling access by the first user to individual ones or lists of contacts associated with the second user.

15 34. The method of claim 30 further comprising the first user selecting a screen name from the contacts of the second user, which selection adds the selected screen name as a contact for the first user.

20 35. The method of claim 30 wherein the second user selects a screen name from the contact list of the first user, and the first user causes a message to be sent to a third user, the third user being the person using the selected screen name, the message alerting the third user that the second user is adding the third user to the second user's contact list.

25 36. The method of claim 30 wherein the first user, upon the second user selecting a name from the contact of the first user, acts as an intermediary, sending at least a message to a third user being the person using the selected screen name, the message seeking approval for addition of the selected screen name to the contact list of the second user.

37. The method of claim 30 wherein the first user, upon the second user selecting a screen name from the contact list of the first user, sends messages to both the third user, being the person using the selected screen name, and also to the second user providing introductory information to each of the second and third users about the other of the second and third users.

38. The method of claim 37 wherein the messages sent also seek response from the second and third users granting or withholding authorization for the addition of each user's screen name to the other user's contact list.

39. A machine-readable medium having stored thereon a set of instructions that cause a machine to perform a method for providing new contacts to users of an instant messaging (IM) network comprising:

receiving a field-independent search query; and
performing a search of stored user profile information using the query.

40. The machine-readable medium of claim 39 wherein the method comprises a further action for providing contact information resulting from the search to a user initiating the search query.

41. A machine-readable medium having stored thereon a set of instructions that cause a machine to perform a method for expanding an IM network, comprising:

providing network communication between a first and second user such that each is listed by the other as a contact; and

making other contacts of the first user available for selection by the second user for addition to the second user's contact list.

42. The medium of claim 41 wherein the network is the Internet network.

5 43. The medium of claim 41 wherein the second user groups contacts in distinct separate lists, and the first user is enabled to browse contacts in only the second user's list that includes the first user as a contact.

10 44. The medium of claim 43 further comprising the second user enabling and disabling access by the first user to individual ones or lists of contacts associated with the second user.

15 45. The medium of claim 41 further comprising the first user selecting a screen name from the contacts of the second user, which selection adds the selected screen name as a contact for the first user.

20 46. The medium of claim 41 wherein the second user selects a screen name from the contact list of the first user, and the first user causes a message to be sent to a third user, the third user being the person using the selected screen name, the message alerting the third user that the second user is adding the third user to the second user's contact list.

25 47. The medium of claim 41 wherein the first user, upon the second user selecting a name from the contact of the first user, acts as an intermediary, sending at least a message to a third user being the person using the selected screen name, the message seeking approval for addition of the selected screen name to the contact list of the second user.

48. The medium of claim 41 wherein the first user, upon the second user selecting a screen name from the contact list of the first user, sends

messages to both the third user, being the person using the selected screen name, and also to the second user providing introductory information to each of the second and third users about the other of the second and third users.

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49. The medium of claim 48 wherein the messages sent also seek response from the second and third users granting or withholding authorization for the addition of each user's screen name to the other user's contact list.